

Message Text

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15

ACTION AID-59

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9964

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 0829

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS FOUR CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES,
MEXICO, SECDEF NIACT IMMEDIATE, JCS NIACT IMMEDIATE, USCINCSO
NIACT IMMEDIATE, USUN NY, USMISSION GENEVA.

AIDAC FOR AID/PHA/FORC

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, GT

SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN EARTHQUAKE: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH
PRESIDENT LAUGERUD FEBRUARY 5.

SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR MET WITH PRESIDENT LAUGERUD TO
DELIVER PRESIDENT FORD'S MESSAGE AND TO BRIEF HIM ON FINDINGS
OF DAST. PRESIDENT EXPRESSED DEEP APPRECIATION BOTH
FOR MESSAGE AND FOR US RELIEF EFFORTS, AND ASKED DAST
CONTINUE ITS WORK. GENERAL SITE FOR US FIELD HOSPITAL AGREED UPON.
PRESIDENT MADE URGENT REQUEST FOR CHINOOK HELICOPTERS AND FOR US
ENGINEER BATTALION TO ASSIST IN CLEARING VITAL HIGHWAY TO
ATLANTIC. END SUMMARY.

1. AMBASSADOR MET WITH PRESIDENT LAUGERUD AT GUATEMALAN
AIR FORCE HEADQUARTERS AT AURORA AIRPORT AT APPROXIMATELY
7:30 PM FEBRUARY 5. APPOINTMENT HAD BEEN SET BY PRESIDENT
FOR 6 PM BUT HE WAS DELAYED RETURNING FROM HELICOPTER SURVEY
OF HEAVILY DAMAGED AREAS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. DURING
CONVERSATION, PRESIDENT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY DEFENSE MINISTER
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GENERAL ROMEO LUCAS GARCIA, CHIEF OF GUATEMALAN AIR FORCE

COLONEL ROBERTO SALAZAR SSTURIAS, AND OTHER OFFICERS.
AMBASSADOR HAD BROUGHT WITH HIM MISSION DISASTER RELIEF
COORDINATOR AID MISSION DIRECTOR COY, CHIEF USMILGROUP
GUATEMALA COLONEL CORBETT, MILGROUP AF SECTION CHIEF
COLONEL WALLER AND DAST SURVEY TEAM CHIEF MAJOR WILSON.

2. AMBASSADOR ASKED MAJOR WILSON TO BRIEF THE PRESIDENT
ON THE RESULTS OF HIS SURVEY TO DATE USING ANNOTATED MAP
OF GUATEMALA TO INDICATE AREAS OF GREATEST DAMAGE VISITED
AND OBSERVED AND ESTIMATED DESTRUCTION, NUMBERS OF DEAD
AND NUMBERS INJURED. THE PRESIDENT FOLLOWED THE BRIEFING
WITH GREAT EARNESTNESS AND INTENSITY, CONFIRMED MANY OF
DAST'S CONCLUSIONS BY HIS OWN OBSERVATIONS AND ADDED
IMPORTANT INFORMATION CONCERNING AREAS HE HAD VISITED
WHICH HAD NOT YET BEEN SURVEYED BY DAST. THE PRESIDENT
EXPRESSED HIS DEEP APPRECIATION FOR US ASSISTANCE AND
SPECIFICALLY FOR THE EXCELLENT AND HIGHLY EXPERT AND
PROFESSIONAL BRIEFING GIVEN BY MAJOR WILSON. HE ASKED
IF MAJOR WILSON AND HIS TEAM COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO
WORK CLOSELY WITH AND ADVISE DEFENSE MINISTER LUCAS
WHO IS IN OVERALL CHARGE OF GUATEMALAN RELIEF EFFORTS
FOR A PERIOD OF TIME FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF INITIAL
SURVEY. AMBASSADOR AGREED.

3. BASED ON DAST FINDINGS, AMBASSADOR RECOMMENDED THAT
US 100-BED HOSPITAL SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE THROUGH THE
NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 5 IN GUATEMALA BE LOADED ON TRUCKS AS
IT ARRIVED AND MOVED TO THE CHIMALTENANGO AREA IN ONE
OF THE MOST SEVERELY DAMAGED REGIONS. THE PRESIDENT
AGREED AND GAVE APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONS TO DEFENSE
MINISTER LUCAS, LEAVING ACTUAL SITE FOR THE HOSPITAL TO
BE WORKED OUT BETWEEN HOSPITAL COMMANDER AND MEMBERS OF
DEFENSE MINISTER'S STAFF.

4. AMBASSADOR ASKED MAJOR WILSON TO FURTHER BRIEF THE
PRESIDENT REGARDING HIS SURVEY OF THE WATER SUPPLY AND
OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS AFFECTING GUATEMALA
CITY. MAJOR WILSON POINTED OUT THE FACT THAT ALTHOUGH
FOR THE MOMENT APPROXIMATELY FORTY PER CENT OF THE
NORMAL WATER SUPPLY OF THE CAPITAL CITY HAD AT LEAST
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TEMPORARILY BEEN RESTORED, HIS SAMPLINGS INDICATED THAT WHILE
THERE WAS YET NO EVIDENCE OF CONTAMINATION, THE WATER SUPPLY
WAS COMPLETELY UNPROTECTED. THE PRESIDENT, UNLIKE GENERAL
LUCAS WHO HAD EARLIER APPEARED SOMEWHAT INDIFFERENT TO
THIS INFORMATION, TOOK MATTER VERY SERIOUSLY AND AFTER
SOME DISCUSSION DIRECTED THE DEFENSE MINISTER TO SEE TO THE PROPER
CHLORINATION OF THE CITY WATER SUPPLY AND ISSUANCE OF WARNING TO THE
POPULATION TO BOIL ALL DRINKING WATER. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO URGED THE

PRESIDENT TO CONSIDER USING SOME OF THE EMERGENCY TENTS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT NOW BEGINNING TO ARRIVE TO PROVIDE SHELTER, A SAFE WATER SUPPLY, FOOD DISTRIBUTION FACILITY AND LATRINES IN THE MOST HEAVILY DAMAGED ZONES OF GUATEMALA CITY. THIS RECOMMENDATION WAS BASED ON DAST'S OBSERVATIONS REGARDING NOT ONLY UNSAFE AND INADEQUATE WATER SUPPLIES BUT ALSO THE FACT THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WERE LIVING IN THE STREETS IN FRONT OF OR NEAR THEIR DAMAGED HOMES WITH LITTLE OR NO SHELTER, FOOD OR WATER AND THAT HUMAN WASTE DISPOSAL COULD SOON CAUSE A SERIOUS THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH. THE PRESIDENT DIRECTED THE DEFENSE MINISTER TO LOOK INTO THIS MATTER.

5. THE PRESIDENT THEN MADE TWO SPECIFIC REQUESTS OF THE US GOVERNMENT. HE EXPRESSED AN URGENT NEED FOR CHINOOK HELICOPTERS FOR USE IN CARRYING FUEL, FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES TO REMOTE AND INACCESSIBLE AREAS, ACCESS ROADS TO MANY OF WHICH HAVE BEEN WIPED OUT BY LANDSLIDES, AND TO EVACUATE SERIOUSLY INJURED PERSONS TO EMERGENCY MEDICAL FACILITIES. SECOND, THE PRESIDENT POINTED OUT THAT THE ATLANTIC HIGHWAY LINKING GUATEMALA CITY WITH PUERTO BARRIOS ON THE ATLANTIC COAST WAS IMPASSABLE IN MANY PLACES AND THAT THE RAIL-ROAD, AS HAD BEEN CONFIRMED BY THE DAST, HAD BEEN DESTROYED. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE CAPITAL CITY IS DEPENDENT FOR FUEL AND MUCH OF ITS FOOD SUPPLY ON THIS HIGHWAY WHICH HIS ADVISORS TOLD HIM COULD NOT BE REOPENED IN LESS THAN TWO MONTHS ASSUMING THE CONCENTRATION OF ALL GUATEMALAN EQUIPMENT AND RESOURCES TO THIS TASK. THE PRESIDENT ASKED IF THE U.S. COULD MAKE AVAILABLE A U.S. MILITARY ENGINEER BATTALION TO ASSIST THE GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT IN REOPENING THIS VITAL ROAD. MAJOR WILSON TOLD THE PRESIDENT HE HAD AN ENGINEER MEMBER OF HIS TEAM WHO WOULD THE FOLLOWING DAY, FEBRUARY 6, SURVEY THE ROAD USING GUATEMALAN HELICOPTERS

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AND ESTIMATE WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED TO REOPEN IT INCLUDING THE COST. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT HE WOULD REPORT THE PRESIDENT'S REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE TO WASHINGTON AND WOULD SEE WHAT COULD BE DONE TO RESPOND TO THEM.

MELOY

NOTE BY OC/T: PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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